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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 002537

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STATE FOR AF/E, AF/RSA AND A/S CARSON

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SO PHUM KDEM SOCI

SUBJECT: Somalia - VOA Arrest Highlights "Faroole's" Increasingly Autocratic Behavior

REF: NAIROBI 2503

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs, State Department, Somalia Unit; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Puntland President "Faroole's" movement over recent months toward increasingly autocratic behavior (ref a) was on display once again when on December 21 Puntland security forces arrested Voice of America (VOA) reporter Mohamed Yasin Isaq in the town of Galcaio. President "Faroole" in a December 22 telephone conversation alleged to Somalia Unit Poloff that the reporter was connected to recent "explosions" in Puntland. However, multiple Puntland contacts tell us that "Faroole" and his son, recently appointed Media Advisor to the Puntland President, orchestrated the arrest because they view Isaq's reporting as politically inconvenient. In a December 22 telephone call, Somalia Unit Poloff urged "Faroole" to immediately release Isaq. End summary.

¶2. (C) Puntland forces on December 22 arrested VOA reporter Mohamed Yasin Isaq in the town of Galcaio. It appears that the arrest was made by the Puntland Intelligence Agency (PIA), although a few contacts alleged to us December 22 that unspecified Puntland security forces had made the arrest. (Note: We are continuing to look into which Puntland forces made the arrest but it is virtually certain that President "Faroole" and/or his son gave the order. End note.) Contacts in Galcaio tell us that Isaq was reporting on the Puntland Administration's forceful removal of south-central Somali residents from the Puntland side of Galcaio. Those being expelled are largely Digil and Mirifle from Bay and Bakool regions whom the Puntland Administration has linked to recent security incidents in the region. (Note: The Puntland authorities temporarily banned VOA in October, then lifted the ban following Somalia Unit intercession. The town of Galcaio is split, with the north side of the town considered part of Puntland and the south side belonging to south-central Somalia. However, Somalis in Galcaio intermarry across clan lines and business interests regularly cross administrative lines. End note.)

¶3. (C) Isaq on November 18 was shot and wounded by Puntland forces at a police checkpoint. President "Faroole" in November told us that Isaq was "accidentally shot" because he was speeding. Multiple contacts tell us "Faroole" has given free reign to his son, the director of Garowe online and Media Advisor to the President, to crack down on political rivals and on media competition. The recently-appointed Minister of Information, who could have played a role in restraining the Puntland Administration's actions, is a Somali-Norwegian resident in Uganda who appears unlikely to be able to oppose President "Faroole's"

son.

14. (C) President "Faroole", after being advised (again) of our position on media freedom, on December 22 alleged to Somalia Unit Poloff that Isaq was connected to recent "explosions" in Puntland. "Faroole" claimed to have "proof and documents" from his security forces of Isaq's involvement in recent attacks inside Puntland. Somalia Unit Poloff told "Faroole" the Somali Unit does not have information linking Isaq to attacks in Puntland and advised "Faroole" to share any concrete information to that effect with the USG. "Faroole" then backed away from claims that he had evidence of Isaq's involvement in attacks but described Isaq's reporting as " politically motivated and meant to destabilize Puntland."

15. (C) Comment: The Somalia Unit has been in touch with the UN SRSG who intends to put pressure on "Faroole" via Puntland clan members. The Somalia Unit and the SRSG believe at this juncture that communication with "Faroole" should remain at a junior level. "Faroole" has a history, as illustrated by his behavior during his November visit to Nairobi, of attempting to portray even unpleasant messages from senior diplomats as tacit recognition of his importance. At the same time, we remain concerned about the Puntland authorities' increasingly frequent mistreatment of the media. We are addressing this subject in media appearances, and continue to work with media outlets and journalists to gather facts and assess the best way to address

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these problems.  
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